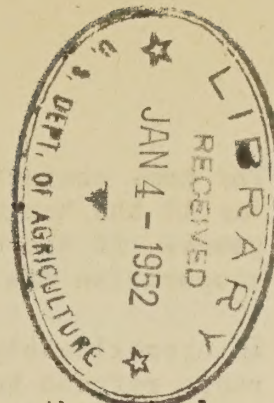


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A STUDY OF THE PRE-SCHOOL CHILD'S CLOTHING
IN WHITE FAMILIES OF RADFORD, VIRGINIA*

Purpose of the Study

This study was planned in order to gain information regarding the actual buying practices and preferences of the homemaker in relation to clothing and the pre-school child.

Procedure

The data for this study were obtained by personal interviews during April and May of 1949, with one hundred white families living in Radford, Virginia, a city of 11,000 population located 48 miles southwest of Roanoke, Virginia. Radford is considered a small industrial city as it contains a ribbon factory, weaving and knitting mills, a shirt factory, an iron foundry, a paper box factory, railroad shops, a creamery, and a limestone company. These companies employ from 25 to 1,000 persons each. Also located within the city limits is Radford College, a small women's college which was established in 1913.

Through information obtained from the city clerk and from sample counting** within the city, it was estimated that there were APPROXIMATELY 3,000*** white family units in Radford. Random counting disclosed that about half of the families lived on streets running east and west and the other half on streets running north and south.

Before setting up the scheme for selecting families, the interviewer did four days of sample interviewing. This procedure disclosed that there was approximately one eligible family****for every seven or eight houses on a street. On the basis of this information the sample was drawn so that the interviewer called on every other family on all streets running east and west.

*Excerpts from a thesis by Evelyn Lilly Blake, Department of Home Economics, Virginia Polytechnic Institute 1949, for use of Extension Clothing Specialists - Alice Linn, Extension Clothing Specialist, Extension Service, USDA, Washington 25, D. C. 1951.

**Sample counting was done by driving on all the streets of Radford and marking the number of houses and types of neighborhoods on a city map.

***Estimate at City Hall, Radford, Va. March 1949.

****An eligible family was one composed of a mother and one or more children between the ages of two to five years inclusive.

The home contact was made by the investigator calling at the home and asking if the homemaker had one or more children in the age group 2 to 5 years. If she had the purpose of the study was explained to her and her cooperation was solicited.

In approximately 750 calls, only 2 homemakers with a child in the 2-5 year* range refused to cooperate. In several cases the homemaker was busy or had appointments to keep at the time the investigator called, but in all cases an appointment for an interview at a later time was given. The investigator held from three to seven interviews per day, the average being five.

Background of Parents of Pre-school Children Studied

The occupations of the breadwinners of these families ranged from laborers to professional workers. Only 4 percent of the fathers were engaged in professional and semi-professional occupations. These included a doctor, two engineers, and one teacher. Business and clerical occupations accounted for 24 percent of the fathers. Skilled and semi-skilled workers made up 61 percent of the fathers' occupations while unskilled laborers accounted for 3 percent. In 8 percent of the families the fathers were deceased or unemployed. The mothers had full time occupations outside the home in 8 percent of the families and part-time work in 2 percent.

***The education of the parents ranged from those with no formal schooling to college graduates, one with a Doctor's degree. Of the total group of parents, 5.5 percent had gone to the fifth grade or less, 31 percent had gone as far as the sixth or seventh grade, 45 percent had attended high school and 17.5 percent had attended or been graduated from college, while the education of 1 percent of the parents was unknown.

***Some home economics instruction had been received by 40 percent of the mothers. This included 4-H projects, one or more years of home economics instruction in high school, and home economics on the college level.

These 100 families had 130 male and 132 female children with an average of 2.6 children per family. The largest family in the group had 9 children while 23 families had only 1 child.

The 105 pre-school children, that is, children in the 2-5 year age group, in these families consisted of 48 boys and 57 girls.

*The age group 2-5 years was selected for two reasons. It seemed inadvisable to select children younger than 2, as the child usually is wearing a large portion of its layette, much of which is white and has few fitting problems. It is believed that the pre-school child is not subjected to the social pressures typical of school age children which influences parents' selection of clothing. Also it was felt that many of the factors being studied would not be problems in the clothing of children under 2 years of age.

Clothing Construction and Care Facilities

If these homemakers' judgment can be relied upon*, 24 percent of the homemakers sewed well, 38 percent sewed fairly well, while the remaining 38 percent sewed poorly or not at all. Sewing ability increased very slightly as home economics instruction and general education increased.

In 40 percent of the families someone outside the family constructed some garments for the pre-school children. In most cases this seamstress was a relative rather than a professional. In 4 percent of the families, the mothers took in sewing for supplementing the family income.

Slightly more than half of the families, 52 percent had sewing machines. Over half of the machines, 61.5 percent, were reported in good condition. The age of the machines ranged from three weeks to fifty-five years. For about a third of the machines, 32.5 percent, the age was unknown since they were second hand or handed down.

***On the whole the family laundry was done in the home. In most cases the home was fairly well equipped for laundry purposes. Eighty-two percent of the families owned washing machines, of which 12.2 percent were automatic. In the homes where no washing machines were available, only a few sent their clothes to a laundry, while the others used tubs. All of the families owned at least one electric iron. In addition to electric irons, 2 percent of the families owned automatic ironers, and 4 percent owned electric steam irons.

On the basis of these data it appears that the families in this study represent a fairly good cross section of the urban population of Virginia. The families ranged in size from three to eleven persons with an average of 4.6. The income of the families ranged from \$288 to \$10,000 a year with 58 percent of the families having from \$2000 to \$4000 incomes....

The Clothing Wardrobe of the Pre-School Child

The data in this study indicate that the clothing wardrobe of the pre-school child varies greatly from one family to another not only in the total cost but in the number of garments in the wardrobe. For example, within the 100 families included in this study, the number of total garments owned by pre-school children varied from 19 to 105. The number of underwear shorts and panties for pre-school boys and girls ranged from 0 to 48 pairs. For undershirts the range was from 0 to 16; slips from 0 to 15; shirts and blouses from 0 to 30; dresses from 0 to 20; socks from 3 to 36 pairs; and shoes from 1 to 4 pairs.

The variation in price for selected garments was almost as great as that in number. Heavy coats ranged in price from \$5 to \$39.95, snow suits from \$1.50 to \$17.95, and shoes from \$1.98 to \$7.

*In many cases the interviewer had a chance to observe the sewing results of the homemakers. In most cases what the homemaker considered good would be interpreted as fair by home economists.

The average pre-school child's wardrobe was valued at \$118.01, and contained 61.7 garments. The number of garments in the wardrobe for boys and girls was similar; however, the cost of the garments for girls was slightly higher in most cases.

There was no consistent variation in the number of garments owned by pre-school children from one income level to another. For example, the child in the lowest income group averaged 1.8 pairs of shoes while in the highest he owned 2.5 pairs. For socks these figures were 8.3 and 9.6 respectively. The child in the lowest income group had 6.1 pairs of shorts as compared to 12.8 in the highest income group. When little girls' slips are compared, girls in the lowest income group had nearly twice as many per child as the highest income group.

***The cost of clothing children was more of a burden for the low income groups than for the higher ones. It will be noted in Table 6 that the number of children per family had a tendency to increase as the income decreased. In other words, the families with incomes of under \$2000 had 3.3 children as compared to 2.5 for the families with incomes of \$4000 and over. If the cost of the pre-school child's clothing is representative of clothing costs for the children, the proportion of the income necessary to clothe the children in the families with incomes under \$2000 was 19.8 percent as compared to 7.1 percent in the highest income group.

Source of and Fiber Content in Garments

Approximately three-fourths of the garments found in the pre-school child's wardrobe were purchased by the mother, 12.4 percent were homemade, while 11 percent were gifts and only 3.2 percent were hand-me-downs.

The garments most frequently constructed at home were gowns, slips, and dresses for little girls, and bathing and sun suits for boys and girls. Only in the case of gowns and slips were as many as one-half constructed at home.

***If these data are representative, the average wardrobe of the pre-school child consists of 62 items. The child in the lowest income group had 45 items as compared to 75 in the highest income group.

The variation in price for garments was greater between the income groups than was the number of garments. The average cost for clothing a child in the income group under \$2000 was \$74.99 as compared to \$178.75 for a child in the highest income group. On the whole clothing a pre-school girl was more expensive than clothing a pre-school boy, although the total number of garments was similar.

It was not customary for the mothers to make their pre-school children's clothing. Over three-fourths of the garments were purchased ready made.

Cotton as a fiber was found in over three-fourths of all items in the pre-school child's wardrobe while rayon accounted for only 3.6 percent. Wool, of which 12.4 percent of the garments were made, was found in coats, sweaters, bedroom shoes, snow suits, and gloves.

"Self-help" Garments

This study indicates that homemakers are not aware of "self-help" features on children's garments. Of the 100 homemakers in the study, 67 had no knowledge of what "self-help" meant. The homemakers who were familiar with "self-help" bought garments with this feature. Undoubtedly more must be done to acquaint the homemaker with these garments which supposedly save time and help in the training of the child, if homemakers are to purchase garments with this feature.

Buying By Brand Name

Businesses have spent large sums of money on advertising brand names of merchandise. It is generally assumed that high pressure advertising and salesmanship result in selling merchandise to consumers on the basis of brand names rather than quality; that many consumers recognize quality and prefer to use their own judgment in selection. Those who do not trust their own judgment may prefer buying by brand name once they have made a selection and found it satisfactory.

The data in this study indicate that homemakers seldom buy children's clothing by brand name. Chart 9 shows the percent of homemakers who bought the major items of the child's wardrobe by brand name. Shoes were the only item which as many as half of the homemakers bought in this way. The only other items that an appreciable number of homemakers bought by brand name were dresses, underwear, and overalls. The homemakers of the highest income group and those with more formal education had a greater tendency to buy by brand name. Homemakers with home economics instruction, however, bought less frequently by brand name than did those who had no such training. The only advantage advanced by these homemakers for buying by brand name was that if they purchased a garment which gave satisfaction they felt safer in buying the same brand garment again. On the whole these homemakers knew few* brand names and sought a type of garment when shopping rather than a brand of garment.

Factors Considered Important by Homemakers When Buying

Factors which should be considered when purchasing children's clothing seemed fairly well crystallized in the minds of these homemakers. Out of a list of nine factors these homemakers placed durability first and price second in importance. The importance of the selection factors was similar for all homemakers irrespective of education and income.

*Of eighteen common brand names only 10 percent of the homemakers used as many as one-sixth of them.

Sewing Practices

Girls' clothing more frequently was made at home than was boys.* Only 14.9 percent of the mothers did most of the sewing for their pre-school sons, while 50.8 percent of the mothers made most of their daughters' clothing. The percent of homemakers making boys' clothing at home increased consistently with education. Also there was a slight tendency for the better educated homemakers to make more of the girls' clothing than did the grade school group. The homemakers felt that ready-made boys' clothing looked better than homemade clothing. Of the pre-school girls' wardrobes dresses were the items usually made at home.

The women who made most of their children's clothes did so for one or more of the following reasons:

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Percent of homemakers</u>
Saving of money - - - - -	80.1
Desire to sew - - - - -	47.9
To get more perfect fit - - - - -	45.1
Ability to make exact article needed- - -	16.9
Desire to use materials on hand - - - - -	5.6
Other reasons**- - - - -	18.7

Homemakers who bought most of their children's clothing gave the following reasons for doing so:

<u>Reason</u>	<u>Percent of homemakers</u>
Inability to sew - - - - -	40.0
Dissatisfaction with fit or appearance of homemade garments - - - - -	29.6
Saving of time - - - - -	15.2
Lack of sewing machine - - - - -	12.2
Dislike for sewing - - - - -	10.5
Saving of money- - - - -	5.9
Other reasons*** - - - - -	17.7

It is interesting to note that only 5.9 percent of the homemakers believed that they saved money by buying ready-made children's garments, while 80 percent felt that they could save money by making children's clothing.

*Similar findings are reported by Anna Frances Bowen in the study "Consumer Habits in the Selection and Purchase of Children's Clothing."

**These included the durability of homemade garments and the desire to design patterns.

***These included eye trouble and the fact that it is easier to buy for boys than to sew for them.

If these data are representative, the average homemaker buys pre-school children's clothing at a general department store. If she is in a low income group, she buys her pre-school children's clothing as needed, while if she is in a higher income group, she is more likely to buy seasonally. The average homemaker does little mending of her pre-school children's clothes. As her income decreases, she tends to save money by buying at sales, buying irregulars and soiled garments. She sometimes makes over garments from the wardrobes of other family members for the pre-school child. She has only a fair knowledge of labels, and on the whole has a poor knowledge of most terms used on labels. The average homemaker prefers a label that gives such information as colorfastness, amount of shrinkage, and washing directions. Over half of the homemakers in this study were not familiar with the term "self-help" garments, but those who had used these garments preferred them to all others. The average homemaker does not buy children's clothing by brand name. The main factors she looks for when shopping for her pre-school child are durability, fit, price, and comfort.

Clothing Changes Desired by Homemakers

If children's clothing is to be improved the changes desired by homemakers, or the points at which clothing fails to give satisfaction, must be made known to the manufacturers and retailers of children's clothing. It can be seen in Table 15 that the change desired by the largest number of homemakers was for more durable and better constructed garments in the lower and moderate price line. Twenty-eight percent of the homemakers wanted to see changes made in sizing of children's garments. These included such changes as standardization of sizes, more allowance for growth, and the breaking down of each age size into tall, thin, average, and short-chubby sizes. Twenty-four percent of the homemakers listed needed changes in style.

Table 15
Changes Homemakers Would Like to See Made in Children's Clothing

	Percent of Homemakers
Sizes:	28
More clothes for boys - - - - -	3
Sizes standardized - - - - -	5
Sizes in measurements - - - - -	2
Three sizes in each age group, tall thin, average, short, plump - - - - -	10
Shorter anklets for young pre-school children - -	1
Sizes that fit with allowance for growth - - -	7
Style:	24
More different styles for pre-school girls - - -	1
More different styles for pre-school boys - - -	5
More "self-help" on garments - - - - -	9
Better designs for pre-school girls - - - - -	4
Overalls with reinforcements sewed on knees - - -	1
Dress plackets experted through waistline - - -	2
Attractive sweaters made of a fiber other than wool	1
Garments made with an extra piece of material stitched on the inside for patching - - - - -	1

Table 15 (Cont'd)

	Percent of Homemakers
<u>Price and durability:</u>	<u>44</u>
Prices more in line with quality - - - - -	28
"Let out" coats that are less expensive- - - - -	2
More durable materials used - - - - -	6
Stronger seams - - - - -	6
More durable "dress clothes" - - - - -	2

The homemakers in the upper income group were more conscious of needed changes than were those in the lower income group. The homemakers in the highest income group wanted an average of 1.25 changes per person while those in the lowest income group mentioned an average of only 0.6 changes per person. Thirty-four percent of the homemakers had no changes to suggest.

Problems of Children's Clothing

All of the parents in the study had one or more fitting problems with their children's clothing. These problems were more often associated with boys' clothing than with girls'. The most frequent complaint was that the garments were too long.

The homemakers were more critical of the workmanship found on pre-school children's clothing than with any other feature. Poor buttons and button-holes, poor stitching, snaps and hooks not securely fastened were problems for them.

The most common difficulty associated with fabric centered around laundering. As shown below, 40 percent of the homemakers had trouble with colors running and 35 percent found garments hard to iron.

<u>Difficulty</u>	<u>Percent of Homemakers</u>
Colors run	40
Difficult to iron.	35
Poor design.	27
Poor wearing qualities	26
Poor washing qualities	22
Others	2

As shown below the style feature least liked by mothers was colored trim on white garments. Homemakers stated that the color from the trim often ran on to the body of the garment and bleaching was impossible without spoiling the trim. Almost three-fourths of the mothers disliked puffed pockets on little girls' dresses. One mother stated, "There just is not an iron made that will iron those things." Most of the mothers liked gathers and ruffles but disliked rickrack as a trim.

<u>Style Feature</u>	<u>Percent of Homemakers</u>
Colored trim and white garments.	82.1
Puffed pockets	73.2
Rickrack.	66.1
Ribbons.	48.2
Small buttons.	48.2
Pleats	37.5
Puffed sleeves	26.8
Lace	26.8
Ruffles.	16.9
Gathers.	6.9

In order to obtain further information on adequacy of children's clothing the homemakers were asked what they considered the major problems faced in clothing pre-school children. 89 percent of the mothers felt that children's clothing was too expensive, while more than half of the homemakers felt that size in children's clothing "meant nothing" as a guide for buying. The views of the homemakers were similar whether or not they had home economics instruction.

Although the women in this study complained bitterly about children's garments as a whole, only 35 percent were able to list specific garments purchased during the last two years which had not given satisfaction. The homemakers in the two lowest income groups made only a third as many complaints about unsatisfactory garments as did those homemakers in the two highest income groups. Shoes gave the most dissatisfaction. Several mothers made such statements as "When I pay \$5 for a pair of shoes, I expect my child to be able to get at least 6 months wear out of them." Homemakers also complained that the hats and caps that came with coats and snow suits did not fit.

Few of the homemakers returned to the retailer garments that had not given satisfaction. The reasons for not returning the garments were: 1) They felt inability to get an adjustment after the garment was worn, and 2) the time and effort necessary to return the garment and go through the necessary procedure to apply for an adjustment. Two homemakers stated that they had returned shoes when the soles came off with less than a month's wear. One received no adjustment, and the other got \$2 off on a new pair of shoes.

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